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Counselors working with developmental groups need: (1) a thorough understanding of their group, (2) great skill, and (3) deep personal involvement. The author suggests specific characteristics for successful developmental groups: (1) the desire of the entire residence hall staff to be involved, (2) a co-ed group limited to eight members, and (3) an evolutionary pattern in the development of the group. Groups can provide: (1) support for resident assistants in becoming more sensitive to themselves and the students, (2) a close working relationship between resident hall staffs and the counseling center, and (3) a chance for counselors to become sensitive to the needs and problems of the campus and to create a more psychologically healthy climate on the campus. (Author/EK)

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Technique and Facilitation of Developmental Groups

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Counselors who work with developmental groups need special characteristics. They need to be student ecologists; to not know dormitory atmosphere, social life patterns, subcultures and campus problems is to be ignorant and of limited help. Knowing student life only as seen through the eyes of individual clients at a Counseling Center is not adequate. Counselors also need to be mental health workers to deal in prevention and to have close working relationships with resident halls as consultants. As individuals, counselors need to be flexible, adaptable, warm, friendly, and informal. Characteristics which hinder success in this unique kind of group is for a counselor to have to be a therapist, to be a director, to be unable to tolerate changes of level, and to have a need to maintain a status and role superior to that of the students. There are some things that counselors need to enjoy to work with resident assistants. They need to enjoy college students; they need to enjoy normality, for the emphasis is on normal developmental patterns, not on pathology. They need to be comfortable and enjoy sharing themselves and being real as a person. The ability to work with a co-counselor is also an important asset. In summary, it takes counselors with a unique breadth and depth of skill and a unique breadth and depth of personal involvement to both be effective and to feel satisfied in working with developmental groups.

In initiating a program of developmental groups there are some vital components for success. First there must be the cooperation, the understanding, and the desire of the entire residence hall staff to be involved in this program. Without the support of the head resident it is difficult to have a good group in any residence hall. The opportunity to participate in a developmental group should be presented

by members of the counseling staff at a residence hall staff meeting describing the program. This provides for immediate interaction with the students and the counselors and provides for clarity and certainty of communication. This is most important in clearly presenting the opportunity to participate as voluntary.

We have found that there is a best setting for developmental groups. First, they should be co-ed and limited to eight in number. Many areas relate to male-female relations and many problems in the dormitory revolve around masculinity and femininty dimensions. Thus it is important that the girls and the fellows have an opportunity to interact and learn from each other. It is also why it is important that the co-counselors be male and female. Their interaction and role modeling are important dimensions. Sessions should be planned once a week for one and one-half to two hours. With the busy schedule of these resident assistants most of the group sessions will be in the late afternoon or evening hours. Ten weeks seems to be a minimal time for a group to develop. Many groups will want to continue an entire year. This decision has to be made on the basis of the number of requests for groups, and the time and availability of group counselors.

From the number of developmental groups with which we have worked it appears that there is an evolutionary pattern. First, the structure of the initial session is vital to the effectiveness and progress of the group. The purpose of the group as one in which each individual can learn how he affects others and how others affect him needs to be clearly discussed and established. It is interesting to note that groups that have to wait and start later in the year seem to know these purposes and to proceed more quickly than the initial groups. The importance of commitment is the second important area to be discussed in the first session. Each member must understand he has not only a responsibility to himself but to other members of the group and that his absence may not only be a disadvantage for himself but a detriment to the group. The third item is that of trust and confidentiality.

From this point on each member has an equal responsibility to the group and to himself to be involved. A typical pattern of a group seems to move from the concerns

and problems of resident assistants to the concerns and problems of resident assistants as separate, unique people. Therefore, early session of developmental group tend to focus on the problems on resident assistants' floors, staff interactions, relations with the head resident, campus issues, and conflicts between being oneself and being an R A. As the focus begins to switch it becomes more personal for each resident assistant. The concerns and problems of the RA's as individuals are the same kinds of problems as other college age students. They are developmental in nature and the group members often discover they have similar kinds of concerns.

Ecolution of the group is <u>not</u> steady and consistent; the group level shifts from cognitive to affective planes and from group to individual concerns, with more freedom and support than in other kinds of groups in order to meet the special needs and stresses of these students. Often the counselor can help to make campus issues such as student strikes, activism and marihuana personal by helping the group members explore their own feelings and attitudes about these issues.

There are other trends which develop within a group. One is the group's tendency to depend less on the counselors and more upon each other for direction and help. Obviously, this movement is to be supported and the counselor needs to feel comfortable moving into the background. The tone of the group has always been of helpfulness, of trying to understand; affection, caring, anger, humor are shown. There is, however, no premium on hostility or confrontation. In many groups an immensely warm, close, and deep relationship develops. In fact, many groups terminate with a party!

The role of the counselors within the group setting also needs to be examined. Initially, the counselors help with the direction and focus of the group. The group needs it and wants it. Then their role is to facilitate <u>group</u> interaction. The goal is to help the group help each other rather than to do individual counseling within a group setting. Raising issues and asking questions can be very helpful. For example, "What ideas do you have to help Tim?" "Why do you think you've gotten

into this bind?" The group members need help in learning how to respond and how to be helpful; they need help in testing themselves out against other's view of them and discovering their own feelings toward others. And most of all counselors must openly, honestly, and genuinely respond themselves.

The consequences of developmental groups are many. Many RA's have seen the group experience as one of their most meaningful college experiences. They feel they become more effective in interactions with students on their floors and they become more comfortable in making referrals to the counseling center. They also indicate they feel real personal growth as individuals. Counselors see the benefits of the groups to be that minor problems can be handled effectively by residence hall staff members and more appropriate and better referrals are made to the counseling center. They also feel that their own participation is a real learning experience in terms of keeping in touch with the total campus environment. One additional benefit is a potential source of student group leaders.

Some resident assistants having been in developmental groups can be trained to handle their own groups. Students have shown they can be extremely effective leaders of a small group with a focused problem with supervision. It was not without some concerns of our own and some opposition from our colleagues that we moved into this project. Our faith and confidence in the students, however, was well rewarded as they were most effective group leaders. Initially, we extended an invitation for group leaders to selected students who had been in our developmental groups. Often there are students who want more experience and are excited about the prospect of this kind of training. We began with a small group - two boys and two girls - and discussed the commitment and involvement of the leaders. As a group, we discussed the area of focus for their groups such as study skills, underachievement, boy-girl relationships, and made a decision about the kind of group to be formed (we focused on underachievement). The training of the student counselors lasted over a period of ten weeks with one weekly two-hour session. Extremely effective preparation was role-playing. Two students would act as the leaders and the other

students and the training counselors would make up the group. The counselors were sure to play all kinds of roles and have a variety of dynamics. Our role playing group sessions would last 20 to 30 minutes followed by an hour or hour and one-half discussion of how the students felt both as counselors and as group members; of the dynamics of the various members of the group; and of what to do; that is, techniques.

Following the training period, the residence hall staff identified students with the designated problem and informed them of the opportunity to participate in these groups. The counselors then held a meeting of the interested students, explaining the program and the use of student counselors. Co-ed groups of six each were then formed with two student counselors. A fellow and a girl for each group. During the six weeks in which the groups met the student counselors met with the counselor trainers on a weekly basis to go over tapes, to share experiences, feelings, and problems with each other and the supervisors. In these supervisory sessions, we discovered that these students were much more open, honest, and comfortable than practicum students at either the master's or the doctoral level. Perhaps the freedom from evaluation enabled them to be this way. It was not unusual for them to come to a supervisory session saying "Skip the first 15 minutes, nothing happened," or "Let's play the good part."

At this time evaluation of student-led groups is of a subjective nature. We believe that students can do a terrific job. The students who were group members were very positive over their experience and were specific in summarizing what they had gained from it. The leaders developed a real sense of humility about what they did not know, but they could own the excitement and pleasure and thrill of learning that took place within their groups. As the counselors viewed these student leaders they saw them as skilled as many professionally trained workers and as having more training in group work than many counselors. As these undergraduates shared their experiences as group leaders with doctoral students the latter group felt very threatened! Student leaders developed a tremendous amount of poise and confidence but it always was tapered with sound judgment. Those of us that have been

priviledged to work with these students have found it a fantastically rewarding experience.

In summary, it can be said that developmental groups are a value to the entire mental health environment of a campus. They provide support for resident assistants in becoming more sensitive to themselves and to students with whom they work. They provide a close working relationship between resident hall staffs and the counseling center. They provide counselors an opportunity to become sensitive to the needs and problems of the campus as a whole and hence to exert some influence for change for a more psychologically healthy atmosphere.